

LETTER OF APPEAL

March 10, 2015

LDS Church First Presidency
Thomas S. Monson
Henry B. Eyring
Dieter F. Uchtdorf,

Dear Brethren:

I write to appeal my February 9th, 2015 excommunication from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on charges of apostasy. I also include in this document an accompanying brief written in support of my appeal written by my close friends Nadine Hansen and Kate Kelly. I respectfully request that both documents be considered as my complete appeal.

As an overview, I believe the decision to excommunicate me was not justified substantively. Perhaps more importantly, I have heard from many active members of the Church who believe that after my excommunication, there is no room in the Church for them because they hold some or all of the same views that I hold.

Whether the First Presidency chooses to confirm my excommunication or not, these members deserve clear guidance from the First Presidency as to whether they are also subject to being cut off from the body of the Church for their unorthodox beliefs.

Please consider that a Church member who willingly gives thousands of hours of time, donates 10% and more of their income, and expends great emotional energy to supporting the Church, deserves to know if she or he (or their child, spouse, etc.) might at any time be disciplined or excommunicated from the Church because a local leader determines that this person does not share their local leader's conclusions about one or more of the Church's historical claims or doctrinal teachings.

Additionally, I believe that my case should be re-heard because the disciplinary council failed to follow the procedural rules for a hearing as set forth in the Doctrine and Covenants and the LDS Church Handbook of Instructions. These failures, as I describe below, resulted in a flawed and unfair process. Before cutting someone off from our community, the Church should follow its own rules and meet the scripturally-stated objective of holding a just and fair hearing.

During my disciplinary council on February 8th, 2015, Stake President Bryan King enumerated the following four conditions for apostasy:

- a) Repeatedly act in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders.

- b) Persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after they have been corrected by their bishop or a higher authority.
- c) Continue to follow the teachings of apostate sects (such as those that advocate plural marriage) after being corrected by their bishop or a higher authority.
- d) Formally join another church and advocate its teachings.

He then provided four pages of evidence against me, the majority of which focused on my publicly expressed doubts about several orthodox interpretations of LDS doctrine, including my doubts about an anthropomorphic God, orthodox interpretations regarding Jesus' atonement, the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham, and the LDS Church's claim to be "the one true church on the face of the earth" (see Appendix of the Letter of Appeal for President King's evidence).

I would like to appeal the excommunication on grounds of apostasy for the following specific reasons:

1. LDS Church members should not be excommunicated for publicly expressing doubts.

To begin, I would hope that LDS Church members would not be excommunicated for having and expressing sincere and credible doubts – especially since the LDS Church has spent decades hiding and/or obscuring its problematic history, changing many of its core doctrines and teachings (e.g., the priesthood-temple ban on black members, blood atonement, theosis, dynastic sealings, polygamy/polyandry, Native Americans as Lamanites), and since such doubts are becoming more and more prevalent via the Internet (see <http://cesletter.com> and <http://mormonthink.com>). I believe that Church members have many good reasons to express doubts and concerns about the Church's past behaviors and teachings. I also believe that members should be supported, and not punished, for their legitimate and well-founded doubts and questions. I have come to these conclusions based on my multi-decade faith journey, my interviews and meetings with thousands of Latter-day Saints, and my graduate-level research and practice in clinical and counseling psychology.

2. President King decided that a disciplinary council should be convened before having ever met me, without showing any pastoral concern.

When my previous stake president, Mark Jensen, had concerns about my beliefs, he met with me multiple times over the course of a year's time. His sincerity and care were real and palpable. By the end of those conversations, President Jensen told me that he felt comfortable with my continued membership in good standing, even though I was completely open and honest with him about my doubts regarding God, Jesus, Joseph Smith, the Books of Mormon and Abraham, and the LDS Restoration. *My beliefs have not changed from that point to today.*

In early June, 2014 I received a letter from newly-called Stake President Bryan King – *whom I had never met, and who had never made even a single attempt to reach out to me up to that point.* In the letter, he wrote the following:

“I have chosen to write this letter to you and inquire whether, by your earlier email to Bishop Hunt and your recent public statements, you desire to have your name removed from the records of the Church. As you know, if you make such a request I am bound to honor it. You should know, however, that such name removal will revoke your temple and priesthood blessings. I would urge you to consider this carefully, as it is a very important decision.

If you choose not to have your name removed, then I think we are to the point where I should convene a formal disciplinary council on your behalf for apostasy. Together we would need to arrive at an acceptable time to hold such a council. You should also be aware that if you choose to have your name removed from Church records, I feel it is important to make an appropriate announcement to the adults in the stake that you have chosen this option.”

I found it very disturbing that in my very first correspondence with President King as a newly called stake president, he was already inviting me to resign my membership, having never shown even ten minutes worth of interest in learning more about the legitimate reasons behind my doubts and concerns about the Church, or offering to provide any pastoral care. In my three meetings with President King over the past year, he continued to show no interest in providing any form of sincere pastoral care, or in attempting to genuinely understand the reasons for my doubts and disbelief.

In summary, it was very clear to both my wife and me that President King had decided that excommunication was the desired outcome before having ever met me. For us, the entire disciplinary council process from start to finish felt like a “[kangaroo court](#)” or a “[star chamber](#).”

3. The Stake President provided no evidence during the disciplinary council demonstrating that I met the Church’s criteria for apostasy.

As shown in the attached Appendix and support brief, President King provided no evidence regarding criterion c) or d) for apostasy listed above. Consequently, those conditions are not relevant to this discussion. Instead, virtually all of the evidence offered by President King in the disciplinary council centered around my publicly expressed doubts regarding orthodox views of God, Jesus, the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, and matters of the LDS Restoration.

In my view, this evidence does not in any way satisfy the Church’s requirement for apostasy, which requires one to “[teach] as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine.”

To this day, I have never taught my questions or doubts as Church doctrine – which, again, is required by the Church’s own definition of apostasy.

Regarding the charge of “acting in public opposition to the Church or its leaders,” the evidence that President King provided in the section entitled “Public Distribution and Opposition” simply conveyed my belief that members should be able to determine their own status with the Church, and that I was supportive of their right to self-determination. I do not believe that the quote provided by President King in this section in any way denotes public opposition to the Church or its leaders.

I would also like to note that it is ironic that in casting me out the Church has excommunicated the founder and current owner of the <http://StayLDS.com> web site, which has provided resources for and helped thousands of LDS Church members *stay in the Church* after a crisis of faith. It should also be noted that President King acknowledged none of my extensive history of support for people wanting to remain active in the Church during the disciplinary council, even though it was brought to his attention on several occasions.

4. **Apostle Jeffrey R. Holland has stated publicly that members of the Church should not be excommunicated for not believing that the Book of Mormon is historical.**

President King specifically mentioned my doubts about Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham historicity as grounds for apostasy. However, according to apostle Jeffrey R. Holland:

“I think you'd be as aware as I am that that we have many people who are members of the church who do not have some burning conviction as to its origins, who have some other feeling about it that is not as committed to foundational statements and the premises of Mormonism. But we're not going to invite somebody out of the church over that any more than we would anything else about degrees of belief or steps of hope or steps of conviction. ... We would say: "This is the way I see it, and this is the faith I have; this is the foundation on which I'm going forward. If I can help you work toward that I'd be glad to, but I don't love you less; I don't distance you more; I don't say you're unacceptable to me as a person or even as a Latter-day Saint if you can't make that step or move to the beat of that drum." ... We really don't want to sound smug. We don't want to seem uncompromising and insensitive.”

<http://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/holland.html>

I would assume that Elder Holland’s logic carries forward to the Book of Abraham as well, especially given the Church’s recent admission that the Book of Abraham is not a translation of the Egyptian papyrus, as Joseph Smith claimed that it was. According to the Church:

“None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham, though there is not unanimity, even among non-Mormon scholars, about the proper interpretation of the vignettes on these fragments. Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived.” <https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>

Consequently, the accusation and evidence provided by President King regarding the Books of Mormon and Abraham should be dismissed outright, and in and of themselves invalidate the disciplinary council.

5. Church Policy was not followed in my disciplinary council, with the result that the process was flawed and unfair.

Regarding procedures for a the disciplinary council, D&C 102:17 states:

“Those councilors who draw even numbers, that is, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12, are the individuals who are to stand up in behalf of the accused, and prevent insult and injustice.”

The Church Handbook of Instructions adds,

“After all the evidence has been presented, the appointed high councilors present their view of the matter. They are not prosecutors or defenders. They are councilors, responsible to see that the evidence is examined in its true light before the council. Each is to speak "according to equity and justice" (D&C 102:16). One-half of those appointed to speak are responsible "to stand up in behalf of the accused, and prevent insult and injustice" (D&C 102:17). The accused member and the accuser (if any) are then given another opportunity to speak, after which they are excused from the council room. The stake president may ask for any additional comments from the high council. He and his counselors then withdraw from the council room to confer in private.” Church Handbook of Instructions, Section 6.10.4, p. 63

However, during the entire disciplinary council, *no member of the high council spoke a single word on my behalf*. This felt like an egregious violation of Church procedure, as I was led to believe that one half of the high counselors would be my advocates during the disciplinary

council. Instead, they were completely silent for the entire duration of the meeting. *To reiterate, not one member of the high council ever spoke a word on my behalf during the entire time I was present for the disciplinary council.*

6. Unfair collection of evidence.

One of the Church's stated goals in conducting a disciplinary hearing is that the hearing procedures be "fair," and "just." LDS Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 1, 6.10, p. 59, and 6.10.4, p. 63. However, President King stated in the disciplinary council that he considered evidence he had received from other sources of people outside our stake who testified against me. Nonetheless, he refused to allow me to present evidence I proffered from thousands of LDS individuals and families who live outside our stake who would have testified that my public and private efforts discussing Mormonism had encouraged and aided them in their activity in the Church and faith in the gospel, and of others that would have testified that my efforts had significantly helped to strengthen their marriage, or to alleviate their suffering.

The Church Handbook requires that an accused member be allowed to choose what evidence he or she would like to present in a disciplinary hearing: "If the member desires to present evidence in his behalf, invite him to bring in witnesses one at a time, submit other relevant evidence, comment on the evidence, and make any other statements he desires." Church Handbook of Instructions, Book 1, 6.10.4(4) p. 62. President King's refusal to allow me to present specific types of evidence outside the stake violated this rule.

These unfair procedures had the result that the men participating in the hearing, including President King, could not receive a fair and full picture of myself or my participation in the LDS community. Instead, it appeared that President King had made up his mind that I should be excommunicated, and was not open to learning or including information that might lead him or the council towards a different decision.

For a list of faith-promoting podcast episodes, see here:

<http://mormonstories.org/category/faith/>

<http://athoughtfulfaith.org>

<http://mormonmatters.org>

For examples of how our efforts have helped members stay in the Church, see here:

<http://staylds.com/docs/HowToStay.pdf>

<http://forum.staylds.com/viewforum.php?f=5>

<http://mormonstories.org/messages-to-my-family/>

7. The stake president intentionally used outdated and highly selective quotes in his evidence against me.

As with perhaps most Church members, my thoughts and feelings about the LDS

Church have varied considerably over the past 20 years. Consequently, in June of 2014 I provided President King with my most recent beliefs/statements regarding God, Jesus, the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, etc. This document can be found here: <http://mormonstories.org/what-aspects-of-lds-church-teachingsdoctrine-do-you-still-believe-in-vs-not/>

Unfortunately, instead of relying on this current statement of beliefs for the disciplinary council, President King intentionally chose as evidence several outdated statements: one collected from as early as 2010, and many of which were made during the lowest points in my faith crisis. To me, this was discourteous and a tactic that seemed calculated to support a pre-determined conclusion, as President King intentionally ignored my most current statement of beliefs, while cherry-picking the most egregious, outdated quotes from my past to bolster his case.

It was also very disappointing that President King refused to include any evidence in my favor during the disciplinary council, explicitly refusing the offer to be provided with evidence that would show that I have helped thousands of LDS Church members remain active in the Church, despite their doubts (via StayLDS.com, my “Why I Stay” Sunstone presentation, and through my efforts with Mormon Stories podcast and other podcasts). As mentioned above, President King refused to consider or include any positive evidence from members outside his stake, and then used evidence from members outside of the stake against me in the disciplinary council.

8. **The stake president has not been publicly forthright about the reasons for the disciplinary council, which he has told me include my unwillingness to censor my podcast, Mormon Stories (<http://mormonstories.org>), along with my public support of Ordain Women (<http://ordainwomen.com>) and of same-sex marriage (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MxCXjfAunk>).**

While President King, in his letters to me, has referenced only my publicly-stated doubts about God, Jesus, the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Abraham as the main causes for my disciplinary council, he told me privately on August 7, 2014 that my unwillingness to censor my podcast, along with my support for Ordain Women and Same-Sex Marriage, were major reasons for the disciplinary council. In other words, President King has not been forthright in his letters about several of the reasons he had for calling the disciplinary council. Evidence provided below:

On the censorship of Mormon Stories Podcast: In my August 7, 2014 conversation with President Bryan King outlining his conditions for avoiding a disciplinary council, we had the following exchange:

Bryan King: “You could go back look at your numerous podcasts and know the ones you think are controversial or not.”

John Dehlin: “So, take down any controversial episode?”

Bryan King: “Yes. That would be the thing to do.”

On my support for Ordain Women: During my August 7, 2014 meeting with President King, he stated the following as a condition for avoiding a disciplinary council:

John Dehlin: “What do you mean by ‘stop promoting groups or organizations that espouse doctrines?’”

Bryan King: “I think that’s inherent, you know those, those that would be supporting of Ordain Women.”

On my support of Same-Sex Marriage: During the same conversation, I also inquired about my ability to remain a member in good standing while showing public for same-sex marriage. King’s response was:

Bryan King: “Same-sex marriage is not in harmony with the teachings of the church. So if you come out openly in support of [same-sex marriage], that is a problem.”

See here for a full transcript of the August, 2014 meeting:

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/02/11/us/11mormons-docs.html?_r=0

In addition, as my questions/doubts regarding God, Jesus, the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Abraham have been a matter of public record since 2006 (<http://mormonstories.org/mormon-stories-027-028-and-029-my-story/>), it makes no sense for me to be punished for them in 2015, especially since my prior stake president, Mark Jensen, allowed me to remain a member in good standing and to baptize and confirm my son in 2013 while retaining all of these doubts. In addition, thousands of current, active LDS Church members remain in good standing while having significant doubts about God, Jesus, the Books of Mormon and Abraham, and other fundamental Church teachings.

Consequently, I believe President King’s attempt to publicly name my religious doubts as the cause for my disciplinary council, while telling me in private that my podcast materials and my support for LGBTQ rights and women’s rights were serious issues for him regarding my ability to remain in good standing with the Church, is a cover intended to help the Church avoid negative publicity from a public relations perspective.

To conclude this section, I believe very strongly that the success of my podcast (<http://mormonstories.org>), along with my public advocacy for same-sex marriage (via my TEDx talk in November 2013) and my public support of Ordain Women (also in November, 2013), were the primary causes for this disciplinary council. I do not believe that any of these actions constitute apostasy. But, if I am to be excommunicated for these matters, I believe that the Church should be open about these rationales.

9. **Via an LDS Church spokesman, the Church contributed to misinformation about the reasons behind the disciplinary council, and violated the Church's own policy regarding not commenting on disciplinary councils.**

I have been provided concrete evidence by a number of media outlets that they were directly contacted by Eric Hawkins (Senior Manager, Media Relations, LDS Church Public Affairs Department) wherein he explicitly denied that my public support of Ordain Women and Same-Sex Marriage were factors in the convening of my disciplinary council, requesting corrections. An example of Eric Hawkins' communication is as follows:

“NOT FOR ATTRIBUTION:

Dear [reporter],

I read your article this morning.... about John Dehlin, and was concerned by [some portion of the article mentioning my support for same-sex marriage and Ordain Women].

This is incorrect. If you read the letters from Dehlin's stake president, neither his views on LGBT issues nor the Ordain Women movement are cited. Instead, the apostasy is described as his publicly stated disbelief in foundational Church doctrines including the existence of God, the Atonement of Jesus Christ or the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

This is important because we know there are many in [your readership] who will read your story and therefore have incorrect information. Will you please correct your story to reflect the information in the letters?

Eric Hawkins”

This response was inaccurate and misleading. To be fair, it may not have been intentionally deceptive because Eric Hawkins may not have talked with the stake president before contacting the press outlets, but its result was certainly deceptive. Also, it violated the Church's policy of not commenting on the disciplinary council of its members.

10. **Instead of putting doubting Church members on trial, the LDS Church should do more to make amends for the way it has handled its history and policies.**

While serving as an LDS seminary teacher in Issaquah, Washington approximately 14 years ago, I stumbled upon several very disturbing facts regarding LDS Church history and truth claims, namely:

- That Joseph Smith did not use the golden plates in his translation of the Book of Mormon, but instead placed his head into a hat, and claimed to dictate the

text of the Book of Mormon by peering at magic stones in his hat – the same stones he used to deceive people as a treasure digger.

- That the Book of Mormon mentions several anachronistic items in its text, such as horses, steel swords, cattle, sheep, wheat, etc. – none of which existed in the Americas during Book of Mormon times (600 B.C. to 400 A.D.).
- That DNA, linguistic, and anthropological evidence strongly suggest that Native Americans are of Asiatic, and not of Middle Eastern descent, which contradicts what both the Book of Mormon and LDS Church prophets and apostles have taught its members for over a century.
- That Joseph Smith married over 30 women, several of whom were teenagers, some as young as 14, and over ten of whom were married to other men at the time he married them (i.e., polyandry).
- That when some women declined Joseph Smith's polygamous advances, he slandered them in public, calling them names like "whore."
- That by the LDS Church's own admission, the Book of Abraham is not a translation of the Egyptian papyrus, as I had been taught in the Church.

These facts were deeply disturbing and destabilizing for me to learn in my early 30's, after a lifetime of education from and commitment to the Church. The fact that this information was kept from me for multiple decades made me feel betrayed by the Church.

Consequently, I believe that the LDS Church should do more to make amends for the way that it has intentionally withheld this information from its members and investigators for such a long time. Given the amount of time and money that people invest in the LDS Church, I believe that both investigators and members have a right to become aware of this troubling information *before* they are asked to make lifelong commitments of consecration to the Church. While the recent historical essays are definitely a step in the right direction, these essays most certainly fall short of full disclosure and atonement by Church leadership. Once more, to this day most Church members remain completely unaware of their existence.

In addition, as a mental health professional, I have come to witness firsthand the incredible amount of pain, suffering, divorce, and suicide that the LDS Church's history, teachings and policies can inflict upon its LGBT, feminist, and intellectual members, as well as upon its members who are honest about matters such as masturbation and pornography use.

All of these issues lie at the heart of my publicly expressed doubts and disbelief regarding LDS Church truth claims over the past ten years. Consequently, I believe that the LDS Church would do better to continue making amends for these past and current mistakes – instead of punishing its members (such as myself) who struggle to grapple with these legitimate issues.

Conclusion. To conclude, I believe that my disciplinary council failed to demonstrate that I met the Church's own criteria for apostasy. In addition, I believe that President King and the LDS Public Relations Department have been disingenuous about the reasons behind the disciplinary council, and that the way President King conducted the disciplinary council was unfair and a violation of the Church's guidelines for a disciplinary council.

I would like to end by saying that I sincerely believe that the Church is harming itself by excommunicating me, and people like me. I believe that my doubts and concerns about the Church are legitimate and are becoming increasingly common (see http://www.whymormonsquestion.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Survey-Results_Understanding-Mormon-Disbelief-Mar20121.pdf). I believe that by excommunicating me, the Church is not only "shooting the messenger," but it is also sending a message to tens of thousands of other Church members who share some or all of my perspectives and concerns that they are not welcome in our Church community. I believe that disciplinary councils such as this ultimately lead Church members away from Paul's admonition to, "Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good."

Having now been through this process, I can also testify that LDS disciplinary councils lead to significant public humiliation, shaming, and distress that can be incredibly harmful to the spouses, children, and the extended family of those involved. My experience has been that this disciplinary process has not been Christ-like on any level; we can and should be more open and loving in how we treat those in the Church who have doubts about or cannot accept various aspects of our historical or truth claims — especially given that many of the Church's truth claims have changed over time, and that there are now tens of thousands of Church members in situations analogous to mine.

I will end with a quote by Joseph Smith:

"I do not like the old man being called up for erring in doctrine. It looks too much like the Methodists. And not like the latter-day-saints. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be kicked out of their church. I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammled."

-- Joseph Smith Jr., History of the Church, vol. 5, pg 340

Finally, as a professional courtesy, I respectfully request you direct your written response to the following address: [address withheld]. I would prefer to receive your privileged and confidential response directly, and not mediated through Stake President Bryan King or any other Church leader.

Thank you for considering this appeal.

Sincerely,

John P. Dehlin

APPENDIX

Apostasy as Defined by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Apostasy: Handbook of Instruction

Members who:

1. Repeatedly act in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders.
2. Persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after they have been corrected by their bishop or a higher authority.
3. Continue to follow the teachings of apostate sects (such as those that advocate plural marriage) after being corrected by their bishop or a higher authority.
4. Formally join another church and advocate its teachings.

Apostasy: First Presidency Statement on Apostasy, June 28, 2014

"We understand that from time to time Church members will have questions about Church doctrine, history, or practice. Members are always free to ask such questions and earnestly seek greater understanding. We feel special concern, however, for members who distance themselves from Church doctrine or practice and, by advocacy, encourage others to follow them."

Simply asking questions has never constituted apostasy. Apostasy is repeatedly acting in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its faithful leaders, or persisting, after receiving counsel, in teaching false doctrine."

Mo LGAT / OW

Brief summary of evidence regarding the apostasy of John Dehlin

God

We create God in our image....not the other way around.¹

I'm at the point where I realize that God, the probability that God exists is quite low. . . . As I look at the probability that everything that we have here is just random, and there's no purpose or meaning to it, that actually seems almost as absurd as the idea that there is some type of God. Those seem almost equally absurd to me. . . . there has been enough support for what I've tried to do that I just call that God. I slap the 'God' label on that, fully aware that there is a low probability that there actually is anything. . . . I'm aware that might be completely a product of my imagination.²

Christ

I have no idea whether Jesus existed or not. Anyone who says they know, it's just a matter of faith. I think the probability that Jesus actually really lived and was resurrected is actually really low. And I'm actually not invested in that.³

The atonement: I just don't understand the atonement... This idea that we have to punish someone else for a bunch of other people's mistakes, that just bothers me, the fact that it is even necessary bothers me. . . . Punishing that guy over there for what I did doesn't make sense at all, and so none of that makes sense.⁴

The idea that God makes us imperfect and then we're supposed to beat ourselves up over our imperfections just seems screwed up to me.⁵

¹ Facebook John Dehlin August 21, 2014

² Larsen and Larsen interview, 11:56, 14:43, 15:35 mormonexpression.com January 2, 2012 Podcast 180

³ Larsen and Larsen interview, 16:10 mormonexpression.com January 2, 2012 Podcast 180

⁴ Larsen and Larsen interview, 17:09, 17:56 mormonexpression.com January 2, 2012 Podcast 180

⁵ Larsen and Larsen interview, 17:40 mormonexpression.com January 2, 2012 Podcast 180

The Book of Mormon – Another Testament of Jesus Christ

Calling the Book of Mormon "Bible Fan Fiction" makes perfect sense to me. It's almost the best 3 words I can muster to describe exactly what the Book of Mormon is.⁶

The evidences against the Books of Mormon and Abraham are equally troublesome (or even worse) for anyone willing to seriously consider the evidence (vs. dismiss it for social or emotional reasons).⁷

What I can say for sure is that:

- 1) The Book of Mormon is not a translation of gold plates provided by an ancient American civilization via an angel (which it claims to be)....and
- 2) The Book of Abraham is not a translation of the papyrus (which it claims to be). They are both works of fiction, and the evidence against both of them as translations of ancient documents is OVERWHELMING to anyone who is objective.⁸

I no longer believe in many of the LDS foundational truth claims. Specifically, I do not believe that the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham are translations of ancient records as they claim to be and as Joseph Smith claimed them to be and as the Church claims that they are. I believe that these books are fiction created by Joseph Smith or whoever helped him and that they are not translations of ancient records.⁹

For me, the fact that only believers in Mormonism take the basic historicity of the Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham seriously is a significant challenge/problem to Mormonism's truth claims.¹⁰

The church's exclusive truth claims are not credible. At all. Not even a tiny bit. As in....there's gravity...the earth revolves around the sun.....and the BOM and BOA are not translations of ancient documents. It has become that clear/obvious to me.¹¹

The Book of Abraham

My only point about the Book of Abraham is that it's a fraud. It's not a translation of the papyrus.¹²

⁶ Facebook John Dehlin December 12, 2014

⁷ Facebook John Dehlin December 15, 2014

⁸ Facebook John Dehlin December 15, 2014

⁹ MormonStories Podcast 516 - December 27, 2014

¹⁰ MormonStories.org post, May 7, 2012

¹¹ Facebook John Dehlin December 15, 2014

¹² Facebook December 15, 2014

The Tenets of the Restored Church

I believe very, very strongly that people deserve to know the truth about Mormonism. Most active, believing members of the Church don't join or maintain their membership out of devotion—most of them do base their beliefs and devotion upon the Church's over-simplified truth claims. In other words, they believe the picture that the Church has painted about Joseph Smith. They believe that he was a moral and truthful man; righteous next to Jesus in terms of righteousness. They believe that the Book of Mormon is a translation of an ancient record. They believe that the Book of Abraham is a translation of an ancient record. They believe the scriptures are from God. And they believe that this is literally God's one true church on the Earth and that their prophet literally speaks with God. And because of those literal beliefs and their devotion, people are willing to dedicate massive amounts of money, of their time, years of their lives as missionaries and in service to the Church, and crucial life decisions like marriage and occupations and other types of things, whether or not you have kids, are based on members' literalistic beliefs in the LDS Church's truth claims. And I believe that while this is fine—people have the right to follow the Church, if they believe, I believe that most of the people who maintain their devotion to the Church have not been informed about the facts—the basic facts underlying the Church's literalistic truth claims in any non-deceptive context. And so they're in some sense joining the Church as converts without a full set of information to inform them. Or they're becoming baptized and serving missions and getting their endowments and getting temple married without a full understanding of what they're committing to. And I believe that this is deceptive and this is holding them in some sense spiritually and socially captive and I believe that people have the right to have the full set of information before they engage in such commitments.¹³

Public Distribution and Opposition

Just in the past several months we've had over 1.2 million downloads, just since July of 2014.¹⁴

Regarding my "encouraging members to stay in the church" — this was my position for a time while I was trying to figure out my own relationship with the church (I've vacillated over the years about my own level of activity just as many of you here have), but the StayLDS position is no longer something that I push... and I've been very public about this on my podcast a few times now. I now believe that people should follow their joy... period. In or out of the church. That said, I would guess that many more people have left the church than have stayed because of my internet work — and I'm perfectly happy if they're happy. I mean that.¹⁵

¹³ MormonStories Podcast 516 - December 27, 2014

¹⁴ MormonStories Podcast 516 - December 27, 2014

¹⁵ Blog Post December 15, 2010 <http://exmormon.org/phorum/read.php?2,55919,56118#msg-56118>

STATEMENT OF SUPPORT
APPEAL OF JOHN DEHLIN
TO THE FIRST PRESIDENCY OF
THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF
LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Respectfully Submitted To:
President Thomas S. Monson
President Henry B. Eyring
President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

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INTRODUCTION

John Parkinson Dehlin submits this Statement of Support of his appeal of the decision by his Stake President, Bryan C. King, that he be excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Brother Dehlin disputes in part the factual determinations made by President King, and disputes in full the finding that the factual determinations constitute “apostasy” as defined in the Church Handbook of Instruction. For the reasons stated herein, President King’s decision should be reversed and Brother Dehlin should immediately be reinstated to full fellowship in the Church

BASIS FOR APPEAL

The Doctrine and Covenants Requires the First Presidency Grant a Re-hearing of Brother Dehlin’s Case as If No Decision Had Been Made; and the First Presidency Should Review and Reverse Brother Dehlin’s Excommunication.

The Doctrine and Covenants is canonized into LDS scripture. Doctrine and Covenants section 102 provides the scriptural mandate for how church discipline shall be conducted by a High Council. Verses 12-26 describe the manner in which a High Council disciplinary council must be conducted. The requirement of verse 15 that “the accused has a right to one-half of the council, to prevent insult or injustice” was not followed as no members of the High Council made any attempt to speak in Brother Dehlin’s defense. In fact, no member of the High Council spoke a single word during the disciplinary proceedings, save President King who read aloud a prepared statement.

The protocol violations of both the Doctrine and Covenants and the Church Handbook of Instructions v.1 are described more fully in Brother Dehlin’s Letter of Appeal and will not be further addressed in this Statement of Support. While not discussed here, they should be considered as part of his appeal.

An appeal to the First Presidency is governed by verse 27:

Should the parties or either of them be dissatisfied with the decision of said council, they may appeal to the high council of the seat of the First Presidency of the Church, and have a re-hearing, which case shall there be conducted, according to the former pattern written, as though no such decision had been made. (Emphasis added.)

In other words, by scriptural mandate given in direct revelation to Joseph, the First Presidency must conduct an entirely new hearing in accordance with the rules set forth in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 102. Brother Dehlin requests that the mandate of the Doctrine and Covenants be followed and that the First Presidency conduct a *de novo* hearing. Brother Dehlin exercises his scripturally-based right to request that such a hearing be promptly scheduled at the earliest convenience of the First Presidency.

Only the First Presidency Has the Right and Responsibility to Declare Doctrine And By Extension, To Define Apostasy.

What constitutes the “doctrine” of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not a matter of any local leader’s private interpretation, but rather the right and responsibility to declare doctrine resides exclusively with the First Presidency of the Church and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. President King has no more right to decide what constitutes “doctrine” or “apostasy” than any other member of the Church, except insofar as apostasy is clearly defined in the Church Handbook of Instructions (CHI). To the extent that he thinks Brother Dehlin committed “apostasy,” President King is entirely mistaken, because Brother Dehlin’s words and actions do not meet the definition of “apostasy” as stated in the CHI.

Only the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve can determine what constitutes “doctrine,” and by extension, “apostasy:”

Not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. A single statement made by a single leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, but is not meant to be officially binding for the whole Church. *With divine inspiration, the First Presidency (the prophet and his two counselors) and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (the second-highest governing body of the Church) counsel together to establish doctrine that is consistently proclaimed in official Church publications. This doctrine resides in the four “standard works” of scripture (the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price), official declarations and proclamations, and the Articles of Faith. Isolated statements are often taken out of context, leaving their original meaning distorted. (Emphasis added.)* (<http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/commentary/approaching-mormon-doctrine>)

This statement vests all ultimate authority for determining doctrine solely in the Church’s top leaders. The First Presidency should review Brother Dehlin’s case anew, on its merits. The matter of what constitutes doctrine and apostasy is much too important and far-reaching to be left to the arbitrary whims of individual local leaders. In fact, in a

world where the internet has made the wide-reaching dissemination of information a fact of everyday life for nearly every person on the planet with an internet connection or a cell phone, the First Presidency has the responsibility to clearly define the limits of acceptable discourse within the Church.

The failure to clearly define doctrine for the Church as a whole leaves Church members in the far corners of the earth subject to “leadership roulette.” Some church members are left under the jurisdiction of leaders who may tolerate or encourage vigorous debate, while others leaders seek to unfairly and repressively squelch open conversations. The First Presidency has the responsibility of defining what it means to be a Latter-day Saint in the Twenty-first Century, and it should take this opportunity to do so.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

For approximately ten years, Brother John Dehlin has owned and operated the popular website, mormonstories.org. [Mormonstories.org](http://mormonstories.org) is a forum for podcast interviews with individuals who have a relationship to or knowledge of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is one part of the non-profit Open Stories Foundation, which has a stated goal of creating “online and in-person environments that allow for authentic self-expression and the open discussion of Mormonism.” The website now contains more than 500 interviews, the majority of which were conducted by Brother Dehlin directly. Related websites in the Open Stories network include mormonmatters.org, athoughtfulfaith.com, gaymormonstories.org, and staylds.com. These websites collectively have nearly 800 podcasts, in addition to essays and writings regarding nearly every imaginable topic related to Mormon history, society and thought.

Brother Dehlin has conducted a majority of the interviews found at mormonstories.org, with occasional help from committed volunteer interviewers. Interview subjects range from devout, active, believing latter-day saints to individuals who are no longer LDS, to those who were never LDS, but who have an interest in the LDS Church, Mormon studies or the broader Restoration movement. In most cases, Brother Dehlin’s role is that of a skilled interviewer who does not impose his own views on those being interviewed, but rather seeks to assist those interviewed in telling their own Mormon story, as the URL suggests. The popularity and reach of the podcast is unprecedented and it has made a significant contribution to Mormon studies and Mormon culture.

For most of the ten-year existence of Mormon Stories, Brother Dehlin’s local leaders have made no attempts to interfere with the content of the website. Brother Dehlin’s former stake president, Mark Jensen, had numerous meetings with Brother Dehlin, in which Brother Dehlin was completely honest about his thoughts and feelings about the Church and its teachings, including his misgivings about the disingenuous way the history of the Church was being portrayed in church-produced materials.

In the fall of 2013, a new stake president, Bryan King, was called to preside over Brother Dehlin’s stake. Without ever having a single meeting with Brother Dehlin, President

King sent Brother Dehlin an ultimatum via letter in June of 2014: Resign from the Church or be called to a Disciplinary Council. The ultimatum came with the threat that the Stake President would reveal personal and confidential information regarding the results of the disciplinary proceedings to all adults in the stake. The result of such an announcement would have meant that Brother Dehlin's entire family, including his minor children, would bear the brunt of an adverse and very public decision. Given the threat of public humiliation hanging over Brother Dehlin's head, he decided it was in the best interest of his family to proactively make a public statement himself about the situation.

Following press reports about the threat of a pending disciplinary council, President King met with Brother Dehlin for the first time. A second meeting was scheduled, and Brother Dehlin and his wife met with President King on August 7, 2014. At both the June and August meetings, Brother Dehlin was completely honest and forthcoming about his views about his beliefs and doubts regarding the Church. He explained to President King that neither his views nor his openness about them had changed since the time when his former stake president had told him that he was welcome in the Church, and that he was worthy to baptize and confirm his son into the Church. Brother Dehlin had, after all, all of those years continuously maintained a public platform where he discussed his faith journey with podcast interviewees.

At the outset of the meeting, President King informed Brother Dehlin:

I think as I pondered, and prayed, and fasted about what we should do and where we should go, I think it comes down simply to that we have differences in doctrine. Many people have—and I think it's fair that I share with you too that people have contacted me and have said, neighbors—what great individuals and people that you are. And close neighbors, people that you probably share back yards with or side yards—other people. And I've accepted that and I've been gracious as I've received those and so you need to know that there is support and concern for you. My only comment to them is that I do not have an issue with the Dehlins as a family or the Dehlins as people or individuals. My responsibility as a stake president is doctrinal. And it comes down to the differences in beliefs that we have. And it can be based simply in the fact that as I shared with you last time my testimony, that I believe in God. I believe that his son is Jesus Christ. And I believe in his saving power of the atonement. Which I think is different than some of the things that you have said and we have shared; that you have shared with me and have published. And so I think it comes down simply to the fact that we are here at that crossroads. Ummm, where we go from this point at that crossroads; I have specific feelings of where we should go. (Emphasis added.)

In other words, from the beginning, President King saw his differences with Brother Dehlin as “doctrinal,” and believed that he had a responsibility, as Stake

President, to either persuade or coerce Brother Dehlin to adopt his own (President King's) "doctrinal" views, or to impose church discipline on Brother Dehlin.

ARGUMENT

The reasons for Brother Dehlin's excommunication, as stated in President King's letter informing Brother Dehlin of the excommunication, are "conduct contrary to the laws and order of the church," and specifically, "apostasy." The specific basis for the apostasy charge is:

1. Your teachings disputing the nature of our Heavenly Father and the divinity of Jesus Christ;
2. Your statement that the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham are fraudulent and works of fiction;
3. Your statements and teachings that reject The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as being the true Church with power and authority from God.

President King further states that, "You have spread these teachings widely via the internet to hundreds of people in the past and have share with me, in private correspondence, that you will continue to do so."

As shown below, President King's assertions about of Brother Dehlin's alleged "apostasy" significantly misstates the facts about what Brother Dehlin has said, as well as what he actually believes and what he has done. The actual facts do not support a finding of "apostasy," and President King's decision should be reversed by the First Presidency and Brother Dehlin should immediately be reinstated to full fellowship in the Church.

By The Definition of Apostasy Set Forth in the Church Handbook of Instructions, Brother Dehlin Did Not Commit Apostasy.

There are four bases for "apostasy" in the CHI. They include:

- acting in clear, open and deliberate opposition to the Church or its leaders;
- persisting in teaching as doctrine information that is not doctrine;
- following teachings of apostate sects, and;
- formally joining another church and advocating its teachings.

The disciplinary process is extremely opaque and the letter announcing the final outcome of Brother Dehlin's disciplinary council did not fully elucidate the reasons for his apostasy conviction. However, of the four bases given for apostasy in the CHI, only two could reasonably be characterized as applying to the charges on which President King based his excommunication decision. Under basic principles of due process and fundamental fairness, no one should be excommunicated from the Church, with the

corresponding cancelation of eternal covenants and blessings, unless that individual has actually committed the alleged offense with which they are charged. In Brother Dehlin's case, he was charged with "apostasy" under the CHI.

The only possible applicable bases for a charge of "apostasy" in his case are:

1. Members who "Repeatedly act in clear, open and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders;" or
2. Members who "persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after they have been corrected by their bishop or higher authority."

Brother Dehlin did not do either of these things, and his excommunication should be reversed because his words and actions do not fit the Church's own definition of apostasy.

The Stated Reasons for Brother Dehlin's Excommunication Substantially Mischaracterize Both His Statements and His Beliefs.

Brother Dehlin disputes the accuracy of the statements attributed to him in his excommunication letter. First of all, it is inaccurate to call any of his statements about the nature of God or Jesus Christ "teachings." Brother Dehlin has never presented himself as a "teacher" and has never "taught" about any of these things at all. At most his public statements constitute "doubts" or "questions." He has never taught or stated that his doubts or questions are correct, has never claimed that they are the only way to view ideas about God, or that he has received revelation regarding the matter, and has never in any way suggested that anyone else should adopt his views or doubts or questions as their own.

Brother Dehlin has not spread any "teachings" "far and wide," because he doesn't have any "teachings" about any of the items listed in President King's letter. His views are stated more specifically below, but at no time did he ever "teach" anything about the nature of God, nor does he pretend to know anything about the nature of God. Rather, he has only vocally expressed doubts that indubitably arise in the minds of many thinking, modern people.

Second, regarding the Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham, the Church's own recently published online essays on lds.org acknowledge the historical complications surrounding these books of scripture. Brother Dehlin's doubts and questions about their veracity and authenticity mirror those of many, many thousands of Latter-day Saints who have learned from the widespread information on the internet about the historical problems and questions that the Church's own essays address.

Dr. Henry B. Eyring once said, "But in this Church you don't have to believe anything that isn't true. You go over to the University of Arizona and learn everything you can,

and whatever is true is a part of the gospel.”¹ In addition, the Prophet John Taylor said, “A man in search of truth has no peculiar system to sustain, nor peculiar dogma to defend or theory to uphold; he embraces all truth, and ... if men will divest themselves of bias and prejudice, and prayerfully and conscientiously search after truth, they will find it wherever they turn their attention.”² If these statements still hold true, then it cannot be “apostasy” to make factual, truthful statements about verifiable historical and scientific matters, such as archeology, linguistics, geology, DNA evidence and translation of ancient texts.

Third, the allegation that Brother Dehlin rejects the idea that the church is the *only* true church with authority from God needs to be understood in the context of the church’s own changing views of truth as it pertains to other religions and non-religious organizations. For instance, in the canonized account of the First Vision, Joseph Smith stated that all other religion are “false,” that their “professors” were all “corrupt,” and that their creeds were an “abomination.” The Book of Mormon characterizes the world of religions as having only two churches: the church of God and the great and abominable church of the devil. In the past it was common, if not doctrinal, to characterize the Roman Catholic Church as the “great and abominable” one.

However, today’s perspective on other religious traditions is much less harsh. Statements about other religions recognize the good in many other faiths, temple rites no longer characterize other religious leaders as being in the employ of Satan, and Church leaders argue for inclusion of the LDS Church in the large body of Christian believers, a group early Mormon leaders saw as deeply misled or even evil. Modern church leaders, such as yourselves, often work with leaders of faith traditions on various public initiatives.

Brother Dehlin’s views are further and more specifically discussed below. Taken as a whole, and in the context of how he has stated and discussed them, they simply do not rise to the level of “apostasy” in any of the definitions stated in the CHI.

None of the Stated Reasons for Brother Dehlin’s Excommunication Constitute Acting in Clear, Open or Deliberate Public Opposition to the Church or Its Leaders.

It is completely unclear which, if any, of the statements used against Brother Dehlin fall into which category of “apostasy.” Lacking specific guidance from the Excommunication Letter, the third statement (about the Church’s truth and exclusivity claims) will be discussed in this section, and the other two statements (Book of Mormon and Abraham and nature of God) will be discussed in below in the “doctrine” section below. No matter where they fit into the picture of the excommunication, the discussion is the same in most ways: none of the statements constitute either “opposition” or “false doctrine.”

¹ Henry B. Eyring, “My Father’s Formula,” The Ensign, October 1978. Online at: <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1978/10/my-fathers-formula?lang=eng>

² Journal of Discourses 16:370.

Over the past decade, Brother Dehlin has spoken and written thousands of words about the LDS Church. It is impossible to speak so many words without sometimes saying things in an inaccurate or mistaken way, or in a way that could be misinterpreted. To clarify his views, in June of 2014, Brother Dehlin expressed his views on a number of topics that he gets asked about, posting them to the Mormon Stories website, and sharing them directly with President King for the purposes of being judged for his current beliefs and doubts – not for statements made years prior. Those statements are the best indication of his current beliefs. Regarding the Church and its claims, Brother Dehlin wrote this:

The LDS Restoration. To the extent that God exists and has influence in this world (see “God” above), I am happy to support the notion that God has, at times, inspired the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in various ways. That said, I am not a strong believer in the idea of a “one true church,” nor that all other non-LDS churches are in some way inferior/illegitimate (in their authority, or otherwise). I believe that any church (or secular organization for that matter) is only “true” to the extent that it acts justly, and helps its members become more loving/humble/kind. While I believe that Thomas S. Monson has the ecclesiastical authority to lead the LDS church, I do not believe that any LDS prophet necessarily has privileged access to the divine. Instead, I believe that if God exists, she/he would speak to anyone willing to listen. So....can Thomas S. Monson receive inspiration from God? Possibly. But does God speak to Thomas S. Monson in some way that he/she cannot speak to others? I don’t believe so.
<http://mormonstories.org/what-aspects-of-lds-church-teachingsdoctrine-do-you-still-believe-in-vs-not/>

Of all of the statements in the Excommunication Letter, the one about the Church’s exclusive truth and authority claims may be most closely-related to President King’s claim that Brother Dehlin is in “apostasy” for “opposition to the church and its leaders.” But, does the above statement really rise to that level? Given that the Church has, in striking and official ways, softened its views on the standing of other churches and their believers in God’s sight, Brother Dehlin’s views are not far removed from the mainstream of Church belief, and he does not deserve to be excommunicated.

The current Ensign (March, 2015) has an article by Elder Dallin H. Oaks. In it, Elder Oaks redefines the nature of the Great and Abominable Church. Elder Oaks states:

Nephi was told by revelation that there were only “two churches”: “the church of the Lamb of God” and “the church of the devil.” This description suggests the contrast between those who believe in God and seek to serve Him according to their best understanding and those who reject the existence of God (see 1 Nephi 14:10).³

³ Available online at: <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2015/03/stand-as-witnesses-of-god?lang=eng>.

This statement by Elder Oaks wholly redefines the dichotomy between the “church of the Lamb of God” and the “church of the devil,” placing all those who believe in and serve God in God’s church. It demonstrates clear evolution in thinking from early Mormons who believed that they, and they alone, were God’s chosen church. Brother Dehlin’s statement firmly acknowledges his belief that you, President Monson, have the authority to lead the Church and that you can receive inspiration from God. The fact that he also affirms that others can receive inspiration in the same way does not make him an “apostate.” Latter-day Saints have often been counseled that they can receive their own inspiration from the Holy Ghost, the same way their leaders can at every church level. Brother Dehlin’s statement really puts all people who try to serve God into the same boat, similar to Elder Oaks’s statement. That is not “opposition” to “the Church or its leaders.” At most it is skepticism about Mormon supremacy, but it is not “apostasy.”

None of the Stated Reasons for Brother Dehlin’s Excommunication Constitute Persisting In Teaching as Doctrine Information that Is Not Church Doctrine.

As noted above, nothing Brother Dehlin has ever said about any of his beliefs constitute “false doctrine” under the CHI definition, because he has never “taught” them at all, let alone “as doctrine.” Therefore, they are not “apostasy” under this definition and cannot be a basis for excommunication, even if he is mistaken.

The Excommunication Letter accuses Brother Dehlin of making statements that the Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham are “fraudulent works of fiction.” Although he has expressed doubts and questions about these scriptures, he has “taught” nothing about them. Here is his statement about the Book of Mormon:

Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon has deeply inspired me in my lifetime, especially during my adolescent and early adult years. I do believe that it contains many uplifting and inspiring truths. However, my studies of the Book of Mormon (specifically around DNA and anachronistic concerns) have led me to conclude that the book is most likely a work of 19th century fiction — and not a translation of an ancient record. Please know that I do not revel in or celebrate this conclusion — it is simply what I have determined based on the preponderance of available evidence, and many hours of deep and honest study (and prayer). If anyone has any information that can correct me in this regard, I am certainly open to changing my mind. Finally, I openly reject the racist narrative in the Book of Mormon which claims that God cursed Native Americans with dark skin due to their wickedness.
<http://mormonstories.org/what-aspects-of-lds-church-teachingsdoctrine-do-you-still-believe-in-vs-not/>

The unavoidable fact today is that countless members of the Church have reached conclusions that are similar to Brother Dehlin's. They have reached these conclusions, not because of Brother Dehlin, but because there is significant scientific analysis from many disciplines to suggest that the Book of Mormon is not an actual history of people from Bible times who arrived in the Americas in the literal manner described. The Church's own essays, published on lds.org, affirm the scriptural status of the Book of Mormon, but also acknowledge its complicated historical claims. Indeed, the failure of DNA studies to find any biological link between Native American people and ancestry from the ancient Middle East is undoubtedly the reason for the official slight change made to the preface of the Book of Mormon in 2007 stating that the Book of Mormon peoples are "among" the ancestors of the American Indians, instead of "the principal ancestors of the American Indians." It does not constitute "apostasy" to publicly acknowledge and/or be persuaded by scientific evidence.

The Book of Abraham is even more problematic in some ways than the Book of Mormon, because the Church now owns the original papyrus from which the Book of Abraham came into being. Brother Dehlin's beliefs about the Book of Abraham are as follows:

Book of Abraham. Based on the expert opinions of several Egyptologists, I do not see any evidence that the Book of Abraham is a translation of the papyrus that Joseph Smith purchased while he was in Kirtland. This fact is very troubling to me, since Joseph Smith claimed that the Book of Abraham was a direct translation from the papyrus. For me, this fact significantly erodes Joseph Smith's credibility as a translator. The Kinderhook plates, along with my concerns about the Book of Mormon, only bolster these concerns.

<http://mormonstories.org/what-aspects-of-lds-church-teachingsdoctrine-do-you-still-believe-in-vs-not/>

Brother Dehlin, like Joseph Smith, is not an Egyptologist, but based on the best evidence available from those who are, the Book of Abraham translation appears to bear no resemblance to the Egyptian language text on the papyrus. Some Church apologists have argued that the text might be from a now-missing portion of the papyrus, but the facsimiles in the Book are not missing from the papyrus. Egyptologists have translated the facsimiles, and the translation does not resemble the Book of Abraham in any respect. The Church's own essays openly and truthfully acknowledge this difficulty, by stating, "None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham's name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham."⁴

While the Church may continue to maintain that the Book of Abraham is inspired, canonical writing, but it must do so while acknowledging that Joseph Smith's early statement that it is Abraham's writings, "by his own hand upon the papyrus," is not fact-based.

⁴ Available online at: <https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>.

On March 4, 2006, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland was interviewed by PBS in connection with the Frontline program, *The Mormons*. In his interview he was asked about the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, and about Church members who may not believe in its miraculous origins. He replied:

I think you'd be as aware as I am that that we have many people who are members of the church who do not have some burning conviction as to its origins, who have some other feeling about it that is not as committed to foundational statements and the premises of Mormonism. But we're not going to invite somebody out of the church over that any more than we would anything else about degrees of belief or steps of hope or steps of conviction. ... We would say: "This is the way I see it, and this is the faith I have; this is the foundation on which I'm going forward. *If I can help you work toward that I'd be glad to, but I don't love you less; I don't distance you more; I don't say you're unacceptable to me as a person or even as a Latter-day Saint if you can't make that step or move to the beat of that drum.*" ... We really don't want to sound smug. We don't want to seem uncompromising and insensitive.⁵ (Emphasis added.)

As Elder Holland makes clear, Latter-day Saints who do not believe in the Book of Mormon in the traditional way are still welcome in the Church. Surely that statement must hold true for the Book of Abraham as well, which has the additional question about its authenticity raised by the actual source papyri. It cannot be "apostasy" to accept truthful, scientific facts or find value in scientific, fact-based inquiry.

CONCLUSION

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has reached a time when it can no longer strictly regulate discourse about its beliefs, teachings, practices or culture. The entire range of human knowledge is now largely available to everyone in the developed world, and ideas are no longer self-evident just because they are oft-repeated. They now have to compete in the marketplace of ideas, with the give-and-take process of discourse, including online media like podcasts.

Millions of Latter-day Saints now participate online via blogs, journals and social media. Faithful Latter-day Saints are often in great pain when they learn that things they have been taught as absolute truth are not the way things happened or the way things are. Individuals suffer and family relationships suffer when people come face-to-face with uncomfortable knowledge they are unprepared to process. They desperately need the Church's top leaders to listen to their pain and to respond in ways that does not blame or shame them for finding out and grappling with uncomfortable truths. They need resources to do so in ways that will help families stay together and maintain loving

⁵ Available online at: <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/holland.html>.

relationships, even when loved ones find that their knowledge and understanding simply do not allow them to remain in Church fellowship.

If Brother Dehlin's excommunication is upheld, he will personally go on to have a wonderful, fulfilling life and to do much good in the world. He will continue to make positive contributions to the broad world of Mormon thought and experience. He will continue to help those who are marginalized by Church teachings and practices. The larger problems of dealing with doubt and open inquiry in the Church, however, will remain. Church scholarship will continue unabated. Families will continue to experience great distress and upheaval when members learn uncomfortable truths about the Church. Excommunicating Brother Dehlin sends a powerful message not just to him, but to all who question and doubt and seek truth that they are not welcome in the church, except at the cost of their integrity and their silence. That is a destructive message to individuals and families, and ultimately, it is a destructive message for the Church. Brother Dehlin created and maintains a website called staylds.org designed to give resources to those with doubts who wish to maintain full activity in the Church. Many of his resources and podcasts are designed to help church members weather faith transitions and stay in full fellowship.

Many local leaders fully understand the issues modern Mormons face already and do their best to help individuals and families negotiate today's troubled waters. Brother Dehlin's former stake president, Mark Jensen, wanted him and his family to stay in the Church, their doubts and questions notwithstanding; either President King is too uncomfortable with the questions to allow Brother Dehlin to stay, or he has been advised by one of his superiors to take action. Unfortunately, in his/their discomfort with the questions, he/they shot the messenger. That same dichotomy is repeated throughout the Church, and there are no objective standards by which to measure the level of orthodox Mormon thought required to allow people to stay, or force them to leave.

Ultimately, the buck stops with you, the First Presidency. There is no better time than now for you to take a long, hard look at the stresses that the current state of knowledge and scholarship is placing on members of the Church. It is not sufficient to have apologist websites or unauthorized authors attempt to respond. Not only are they not in a position to provide authoritative answers, but also they have not adequately addressed the problems. People who are referred to them to find answers all too often find that they are chastised for having honest questions. Anonymously-authored essays on lds.org also do not help. For some, they raise more questions than they answer; for others, they have damaged the Church's own credibility by making untrue statements that are easily falsifiable.

What is needed is a new paradigm, one where questions and historical problems are met with compassion and understanding, not with punishment, confiscation of temple recommends, withdrawal of callings and marginalization within what should be supportive faith communities. If members of the First Presidency do not know that this is how questions are met, please be informed right now that that is the case. Social media sites are teeming with examples, often expressed in small, private groups, but

occasionally written up on public blogs, of being punished for raising questions, for supporting their LGBT relatives, or for expressing their beliefs that the Church should provide equitable roles for women. When that happens, there is nowhere for people to go but out of the Church. Often, due to rigid adherence to dogma, all too often, families are harmed or destroyed in the process.

The LDS Church today needs to become a place where Church members can learn how to respect one another's beliefs and struggles. Every question does not need to be answered, and indeed, many questions cannot be answered, but questions must be respected and honored, and where necessary, institutional course corrections need to be made. Church leaders need to model and teach respect for wherever people are on their faith journey. That cannot happen as long as people like Brother Dehlin are excommunicated for speaking publicly about his legitimate questions and concerns. For the above stated reasons, the excommunication of Brother Dehlin should be reversed and his membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should be immediately reinstated.

Dated: March 10, 2015

Respectfully Submitted,

Nadine R. Hansen, Esq.
Kathleen Kelly, Esq.